

Awaz Chitrako “Voices of Photo”

Kathmandu, Nepal

Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS)

Karan Kunwar (MIIS, Nepal)

Ekshana Karki Chhetri (MIIS, Nepal) & Prasna Dongol (Angila Ruskin University, Nepal)

Project Summary:

Humla district is part of the Karnali region in northwestern Nepal. Remoteness and isolation from the major cities also mean limited facilities. Children from this region face multiple disadvantages. Among the many limitations, an insufficient educational institute is one of them. Due to this reason, children forcefully migrate and spend their early adolescence separated from their families in "hostels / care home" during their education. Youths who grow up outside of their families, especially for a prolonged period, cannot connect and maintain relationships with their parents or “understand” their communities.

Children grow up and remain in the hostels/care home for anywhere between 8-12 years until they are 18 years old. When they are 18, they live independently in cities or go back to their families. During this time, the fracture in the relationship with their families and disconnection with communities is visible or realized. We aim to equip adolescents with skills to capture their own stories by providing them with a safe space. The safe space facilitates the reflection process of one’s own emotional upheaval, social dislocation, and lifestyle adjustment.

We believe that participatory storytelling is a powerful tool for an individual to provide a sense of belonging and connection. The process of storytelling helps an individual go through the healing process of years of fragmented relationships with close ones. Hence, we see peace at the ‘me’-cro scale of an adolescent: through unravelling and understanding themselves and their context, as well as trying to reconnect with their families and communities.

Our community partner, Care Experience Network Nepal (CENN), is an organization that works with children who are in a transition phase of adjusting their lives after living in care homes through their Shine Together platform. While in conversation with CENN, we realized a gap in this transition period, which aligned with our own experience of living away from family. The Project for Peace will also train CENN staff to carry out participatory storytelling with the help of photography after the project period. This will equip CENN to create and sustain a more conducive environment for youth to transition across life phases.

Background:

We all are/were international students living away from home to pursue continuing education. Though we separated from our families in different periods of our lives in various stages of our education, we collectively believe living away from home for early adolescents will have a lasting impact on inter/intra personal relations/conflict. The quality of relationships that we build during the early years of our lives will influence the development of the kind of relationships that we will foster later on in life. For example, through our collective experience, we believe the inability to connect with the mother figure to especially create detachment and loneliness even while surrounded by family members. Similarly, reintegrating into a community becomes hard as societal norms and values might differ from where they grew up in care homes. One’s social skills will be built around the experiences gained at this stage of life.

Our vision for the project is to make a significant and lasting impact on the youths who have been disconnected from their families for an extended period of time. After speaking to CENN, we learned how these individuals often face unique challenges and have experienced trauma, which resulted in a lasting impact on their emotional and psychological well-being. By providing a platform for them to express their stories and experiences, this project aims to help participants process their experiences, gain a deeper understanding of themselves, and ultimately find a sense of peace and inner calm.

We believe that this collaboration will have a transformative and lasting effect on adolescent participants. We hope participants can unpack their lived experiences while also building the capacity to tell stories of their lives and their families/communities. Likewise, CENN will benefit from the project activity by guiding this exercise and follow-up with participants to amplify their support and facilitate the healing process.

Awaz Chitrako “Voices of Photo”

Kathmandu, Nepal

Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS)

Karan Kunwar (MIIS, Nepal)

Ekshana Karki Chhetri (MIIS, Nepal) & Prasna Dongol (Angila Ruskin University, Nepal)

Karan has experience working with adolescents and has conducted a participatory approach to storytelling. He will bring his knowledge as both researcher and visual storyteller to the project. Prasna is an award-winning documentary filmmaker/director who specializes in telling the nuanced story of daily life and is an experienced trainer in conducting visual techniques for adolescents. Ekshana, who has experience working as a researcher and story writer, will contribute her expertise to strengthen the capacity of participating adolescents.

Implementation:

Pre-Training: The team will create a module for the writing aspect as well as the use of visual media for creating storytelling at the beginning of July. At the same time, we will collaborate with CENN to select 15 participants. Through our preliminary discussion with CENN, while writing this proposal, we were informed there will be around 15 adolescents ready to leave the hostel in Kathmandu while we implement the project. Among them, there are around 10 female and 5 male participants. Before participation, all participants will be duly informed about the objective and get informed consent.

Training: The training will be for four days from mid-July to the end of July. The participating children will learn various aspects of story writing, types and ways of storytelling, writing for a documentary, camera equipment, filming, and editing. Alongside providing theoretical and hands-on practical knowledge on the visual medium, the young people will also:

- Build leadership skills as they take up different roles in the filmmaking process.
- Build teamwork skills.

After training, each student will get support from 2-3 other participants to take pictures/videos for a day. This activity will take as many days as the total number of participants. We plan to rent a camera and recording device and give these to one participant and the team for a day to capture what they believe to be their most prized possession or important memorabilia/memories that evokes in them their families or communities. The participant will take both video and still-pictures. The project will continue after this day and the participants will be able to work on their stories after the workshop, too.

Post-Training: The mentors will work alongside the participants while they edit photos/videos and write their stories. Participants will write stories in their preferred language, which will be translated into English. Feedback session among the team include: “What worked? What didn’t work? How would we do differently in future?” After the internal feedback session, we will also have a session with CENN on our findings about the tool used and how they could adopt it from our pilot activities.

Adaptive Management: The project will use ideas and principles of adaptive management. The project team will plan to the best of our abilities to implement the activities smoothly. However, we recognize that there will be surprises. Hence, to minimize the impact of unforeseen circumstances, we will conduct a review at the end of each day. It will allow us to address issues arising during the implementation phase. Similarly, the daily briefing will also work as a monitoring of the progress of the project.

We are intentionally careful about the impact on participants when they open up about their lives. Hence, a regular check-in with participants will be carried out by the team members. During the process, if the participant needs professional help, we will communicate with CENN and facilitate sessions with other professionals.

While designing the course itself, we will be designing the materials to address potentially having to do this through an online platform. It will help us to adapt in case of a sudden spike in infectious disease or other disasters. Additionally, we will have a plan in place for equipment failures or technical difficulties, such as the camera or projector not working, that may occur during the workshop. In case of low

Awaz Chitrako “Voices of Photo”**Kathmandu, Nepal****Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS)****Karan Kunwar (MIIS, Nepal)****Ekshana Karki Chhetri (MIIS, Nepal) & Prasna Dongol (Angila Ruskin University, Nepal)**

attendance or participant withdrawal, we will still provide learning materials to the absentees and also for CENN to use in the future. The plan also includes an adoption strategy to modify the curriculum and activities in case of low attendance and ensure that participants who might be unable to attend can access the workshop materials remotely.

Logistics:

The project will take place from June to July 2023 at CENN hall in Kathmandu. During the workshop, food will be provided to all the participants. The cost of flying out to Nepal from the US is around 20% of the total budget; we believe putting more resources for the participant will be better than flying out to Nepal. Accordingly the project leader will be in the US for the implementation period. The proposed team has worked together on multiple projects in a similar manner. We will ensure that we will successfully achieve the anticipated results through careful planning, constant communication, and participating remotely in all phases of implementation.

Anticipated Results:

The project will lead to fifteen stories from fifteen participants in a digital format. utilize the lessons learned from the project activity and the stories created by participants to better inform the organizational approach towards creating programs for better outcomes, as well as to support participants to integrate with their families and community and start the process of healing. Besides participants, CENN staff will also participate in the project activity to learn and adopt applicable practices for future adolescent participants. CENN will conduct similar exercises in the future and reach out to us for guidance, if needed. The project activity's continuity by CENN will have a sustained impact on its own organizational approach towards building stronger re-connection strategies and techniques with families and communities.

About the Community Partner:

Care Experience Network Nepal (CENN): CENN works to strengthen the bonds of youth leaving the care home system. They reach out to such youth to establish a network where they participate and engage in different activities and sharing. Learning how to build relationships is essential for an adolescent to form good connections in personal and professional relationships. Shine Together is a platform created by CENN to explore different social issues and create a change agent in adolescents who grew up in the care system. Change agents act as a cornerstone in building self-confidence and making meaningful connections for future youths who go through the same process.